

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS WHILE VISITING TROOPS IN HAITI FOR THANKSGIVING
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More Drum Soldiers Home for Christmas

Perry Boosts Morale on Holiday Trip to Haiti

By Joe Flynn
Times Staff Writer

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Beads of sweat dripped off Capt. Robert Maxham as he stood in the hazy Caribbean sunlight outside a dining hall in a city of soldiers called Camp Muleskinner.

Nearby, a group of dignitaries surrounded Defense Secretary William J. Perry as he mingled with 10th Mountain Division troops. Thanksgiving dinner was about to be served.

Capt. Maxham, a member of a medical company with the 10th Division, is part of the support group stationed outside the Haitian capital to provide medical care to soldiers stationed there.

"We've seen over 2,100 soldiers sick in all," he said. Most suffer from minor injuries, he said. But he said there's something that can boost a soldier's morale in a hurry.

"The biggest thing is if you can tell a soldier he's going home, he's happy," the captain said.

And Thursday, the defense secretary gave troops who have been in Haiti since Operation Uphold Democracy began in September the dose of good news many had been waiting for.

Mr. Perry signed orders Wednesday that will reduce the U.S. force in Haiti from about 9,000 soldiers to 6,000 by mid-December. That

means more 10th Division troops will return to Fort Drum.

"Many of you that I'm talking to today will be back at your homes by Christmas," Mr. Perry told soldiers lined up at Camp Muleskinner.

Soldiers from the 10th Division who remain in Haiti after Christmas will return to Fort Drum by the end of January, Mr. Perry said. They will be rotated out as another division, which he didn't identify, moves in.

"The last person from the 10th Infantry Division will be going home no later than the third or fourth week in January," Mr. Perry said.

Two ships arrived in the port Thursday to begin loading up military equipment to be returned to America. Much of the equipment is from the 10th Division and will be transported back to Fort Drum, public affairs officer Maj. Rudy R. Cohen said.

Mr. Perry repeated the message at different stops throughout the day. The defense secretary spent Thanksgiving touring Haiti with Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Pa., who is chairman of the House defense appropriations subcommittee.

Mr. Perry made it a point

throughout the day to shake hands and meet with soldiers, most of whom were from the 10th Division. He maneuvered in and out of groups of soldiers, occasionally handing them gifts.

Some had their pictures taken with the defense secretary, others asked for his autograph. Mr. Perry ate with the troops at each stop.

"I think he came at the right time," Sgt. Solomon J. Blevins of the 10th Division said.

"He motivated the soldiers. It shows they're really taking an interest," said Master Sgt. Kenneth Covington of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

The U.S. delegation, which during part of the trip included U.N. Ambassador Madeleine K. Albright, met privately with Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and members of the Haitian government.

"Much has been done since September. Much still remains," Mr. Perry said soon after the meeting. "We are looking forward to working with the Haitian government to assist them in what must be done."

Mr. Aristide noted the holiday when meeting with 10th Division troops assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

"Happy Thanksgiving. Thank you for your presence," he said to the soldiers, many of whom have been guarding the Presidential Palace in Port-au-Prince. "You are in a special home, which is our heart."

The message was the same throughout the day as the delegation toured three military bases scattered throughout the Haitian



countryside. They were shuttled on Blackhawk helicopters.

There was the village of Hinche in central Haiti, not far from the Dominican Republic border. Mountains, mostly stripped of trees, separate Hinche from Port-au-Prince. The delegation received a briefing in Hinche from special forces soldiers, who were based out of Fort Bragg, N.C.

Haitians lined the narrow streets to catch a glimpse of Mr. Aristide as he rode through the village for a surprise visit.

At the troops' camp in Hinche, a group of children sat in the shade of a tree, eating a Thanksgiving dinner prepared by soldiers. Most in the group were girls dressed in white and purple school uniforms.

"We can't have our own children over," said Maj. Daniel Daoust, commander of the special forces unit from Fort Bragg.

Then it was on to Camp Mules-

kiner and Camp Dragon. Both are lined with rows of military tents and dining facilities. Camp Muleskiner, the "Haitian Hideaway" as it's called on signs, boasts of a make-shift swimming pool, ball courts and horseshoe pits.

"This is the place to be if you've got to be here," Capt. Maxham said.

Camp Dragon, where troops from the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry are stationed, was hit hard by Tropical Storm Gordon two weeks ago. Water flooded much of the compound, making for what some soldiers said were the worst conditions they've seen in Haiti.

Despite some setbacks, officials said, the mission has exceeded expectations.

"How could it go any better? Think of where we were 10 weeks ago," said Maj. Gen. David C. Meade, commander of the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum. "I'm not sure the most optimistic

American would have thought it would go this well."

"It's possible for things to fall in to place and work out," Gen. Meade said. "More than anything else, it's the result of the work of the soldiers."

But it was a holiday, and the soldiers at Camp Dragon made sure their Thanksgiving wasn't without a parade.

Some soldiers dressed as women and danced on a make-shift float, while others pulled a Humvee decorated as a bull. One impersonated newly crowned heavyweight champion George Foreman.

And, of course, what would a Thanksgiving day parade be without a Santa Clause at the end? In this case, Santa was surrounded by soldiers dressed in cold-weather gear marching down a dusty road in the hazy sun.

"I guess we've been here a long time," one soldier said.

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U.S. troops will continue exit from Haiti

By Ed McCullough
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Perry sees 6,000 still there after Dec. 15

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Defense Secretary William Perry brought good news for the U.S. forces in Haiti when he arrived yesterday to share Thanksgiving with them: Only 6,000 U.S. troops will remain after Dec. 15.

That is about one-third the level stationed in Haiti at the height of the occupation to restore that nation's elected government.

"You have done an outstanding job," Mr. Perry told about 200 soldiers at the presidential palace after meeting with President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. "You are restoring democracy to this country, and it is moving more quickly and more effectively than anyone imagined."

Army cooks began roasting turkeys, beef and ham two days ago for Thanksgiving delivery to soldiers across Haiti. Soldiers and police from other nations were served, too. A special lunch was

prepared for Muslims from Bangladesh.

Thanksgiving was also a special day for the American troops in Kuwait, who were treated to a hotel feast and an exotic dance by a group of Kuwaitis grateful for U.S. protection from Saddam Hussein.

More than 1,800 U.S. servicemen wolfed down roast turkey and cranberry sauce in a huge hall at a five-star hotel, while sword dancers in white robes and checkered headdresses performed.

"This is great, better than sitting in the barracks," said Spc. Jay Nix, 23, from Portland, Ore.

At the entrance, bedouin tents were set up and soldiers had their photographs taken beside camels.

Mr. Perry arrived in Haiti with Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, to celebrate the holiday with some 9,500 troops, all that remain of the 20,000 who landed in mid-Septem-

ber.

"It is an additional honor that you chose to visit us on your national holiday," a smiling Mr. Aristide told the U.S. delegation. "Today in Haiti there is much to be thankful [for]."

To U.S. soldiers, he said: "You are in a special home which is our heart. You are swimming in our love."

Mr. Aristide, a critic of the U.S. government before his December 1990 election, then presented a live turkey to mark the occasion.

Mrs. Albright stepped onto a helicopter on the palace lawn to visit troops in the southern town of Jacmel, which bore the brunt of Tropical Storm Gordon two Sundays ago.

In a gesture of the occupation's humanitarian aims, Maj. Gen. David Meade, commander of the 10-nation multinational force in Haiti, handed 17-week-old twin boys to

Mrs. Albright and Mr. Perry.

The infants were rescued last week from a hospital in Jacmel and treated at a U.S. military clinic in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

In Kuwait, the \$87,500 dinner tab was picked up by a number of Kuwaiti families and companies who wanted to show their appreciation for the troops, most with the 24th Infantry Division, based in Fort Stewart, Ga.

They flew to Kuwait last month to counter an Iraqi military buildup just north of the Kuwait border.

One of the hosts, businessman Faisal Kazem, 51, brought his two young boys to dine with the troops.

"This is the least we could do for our American friends who came quickly to support Kuwait and who fought the Gulf war to free us," he said.

Most of the dinner guests were scheduled to leave by mid-December. Only a few hundred will stay to maintain heavy weapons in Camp Doha, north of Kuwait City.

Troops of 10th in Haitian Village Hear Perry Praise 'Success Story'

By Joe Flynn
Times Staff Writer

HINCHE, Haiti — Maj. Daniel Daoust's men were sent deep inside the Haitian countryside to the village of Hinche, not far from the Dominican Republic.

His troops, mostly a special forces unit from Fort Bragg, N.C., were joined by a group of soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division's 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

The 10th Division troops, wearing black bulletproof vests, had just returned from patrols in the countryside, accompanied by a bomb-sniffing dog.

Haitian soldiers, dressed in tan



uniforms, lined up in formation outside the military police headquarters and waited for the arrival of newly restored President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Crowds of Haitians began lining up at the gates outside the police headquarters.

It was a community rife with violence and human rights abuses before U.S. troops arrived in September, soldiers said. But they said that's no longer the case.

"This is an exceptional success story," Defense Secretary William J. Perry said during his visit to Hinche on Thursday.

The streets were clean and school is open. Haitians, many of them children, lined up throughout the village to see Mr. Aristide as he made a surprise visit to the village.

The perceived threat to U.S. soldiers throughout the entire re-

gion is extremely low," said Maj. Daoust, commander of the 30-man special forces unit based in Hinche.

But now comes an important hurdle: turning control over to Haitian police, who have been training with U.S. soldiers.

International police monitors are due to arrive in Hinche this week to oversee the transition of power. The U.S. troops will begin pulling out of the military barracks in Hinche in the next two weeks and take up a position about 10 miles from the village.

And, if plans move on schedule, they may leave the region by the end of December.

Once again, the challenges of maintaining democracy will be left in the hands of the Haitians.

"We are in that transition state," Maj. Daoust said during a briefing

with Mr. Perry and Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Pa. "There has to be a transition. ... As much as I'd like to be home for Christmas myself, I still do not want to leave the job undone."

So far, he said, the success of the mission is attributed to town meetings with the Haitians and getting to know the people, particularly the leaders. The soldiers have tried to build a sense of responsibility for democracy in the people, he said.

"This same process is happening at every outpost," Maj. Daoust said.

Giving Haitians the responsibility for their future drew applause from the U.S. delegation visiting Hinche.

"You're doing it the right way," said Mr. Murtha, chairman of the House defense appropriations subcommittee.

Other camps around Haiti may go through the same process as U.S. forces are withdrawn from the Caribbean nation. The U.S. plans to reduce its troop strength from 9,000 soldiers to 6,000 by mid-December.

During his day-long trip through Haiti, Mr. Perry was asked if the United States was pulling its forces out too soon. A concern was

raised that violence could return to the countryside once the soldiers leave.

"The job is not yet done. We will stay here," Mr. Perry said. "I want to emphasize we will keep a U.S. presence here as long as necessary."

The time frame for removing troops from Haiti is based on recommendations from the generals in command. The troops who returned home have either completed their mission or are no longer needed. In some cases, civilian contractors have moved in to provide services.

And soldiers from other countries have started to arrive.

"Everything's been going beautifully," said Maj. Gen. David C. Meade, commander of the 10th Division and Fort Drum.

Mr. Perry announced that many troops from the 10th Division will return home in December. The rest will be sent back to Fort Drum in January when another division takes its place.

Nearly the entire 10th Division — about 8,600 soldiers — was sent to Haiti to be part of Operation Uphold Democracy.

"We're very pleased that Secre-

tary Perry announced the 10th Mountain Division is going to rotate back to Fort Drum in January," Gen. Meade said. "It will have been a four-month tour for us."

Gen. Meade has been in charge of a joint task force of soldiers in Haiti.

"I think there's a lot of hope for Haiti," he said.

And he said the mission reflects well on his troops, many of whom spent last Thanksgiving and Christmas in the African nation of Somalia. Some took part in the relief mission in south Florida, which was devastated by Hurricane Andrew.

The 10th Division's track record may be one reason it's been called on for the recent missions, Gen. Meade said.

"I think a consideration is they go places and get the job done right," he said.

The job in Haiti won the troops strong praise from the U.S. delegation.

Mr. Murtha said he strongly opposed the military operation in Somalia.

"This operation I favor," he said. "I'm gratified to see that progress has been made. The job the military has done has been phenomenal."